

Cognitive obstructions

As explained earlier, cognitive obscurations are the main obstructions to omniscience and thus must be eliminated by Bodhisattvas in order to be able to reach the state of a fully enlightened Buddha. Furthermore, cognitive obscurations refer to the *imprints* that were left by the ignorance apprehending true existence and by the other afflictive obscurations (anger, attachment, etc.) that arose from ignorance. Despite being imprints they are also called "non-afflictive ignorance".

English: cognitive obscuration / obstruction to omniscience

Tibetan: ཤེས་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པ། / ཤེས་སྒྲིབ། *She-pai Drib-pa* (or short:) *She-Drib*

(*She-pa* = cognize/cognition/know/knower, *Drib-pa* = obscuration/obstruction)

The **Commentary of the Supplement to the Middle Way** says:

The imprints of ignorance constitute obstacles towards thorough cognition of the objects of knowledge. The imprints of attachment, aversion and so on that exist [within us] are also the causes of engaging in [particular] bodily and verbal activities. These propensities of ignorance and attachment and so on will cease only [for those who attain] omniscience and Buddhahood; not for others.

The imprints of ignorance constitute the obscurations which obstruct sentient beings' minds from simultaneously knowing all phenomena, that is, from being omniscient. The imprints of attachment and anger cause sentient beings to engage in particular bodily and verbal activities. In the case of an Arhat who has eliminated ignorance and all other delusions, the imprints of attachment and anger may induce negative tendencies such as jumping around like a monkey and calling others "fool".

The word "also" ("*The imprints of attachment, aversion and so on that exist [within us] are also the causes of engaging in [particular] bodily and verbal activities.*") implies that the imprints of attachment and anger also obstruct sentient beings' minds from being omniscient.

Afflictive and cognitive obstructions according to the Prasangika Madhyamika tenet:

	Afflictive obscurations	Cognitive obscurations
Prasangika Madhyamika/ Middle Way Consequentialist tenet	(1) Ignorance apprehending true existence (2) Other delusions such as anger, attachment etc. that are induced by the ignorance apprehending true existence (3) The <i>seeds</i> of the ignorance apprehending true existence and the <i>seeds</i> of the other delusions.	The <i>imprints</i> of the ignorance apprehending true existence and the <i>imprints</i> of the other delusions such as anger, attachment etc. that are induced by the ignorance apprehending true existence

Afflictive and cognitive obscurations according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika tenet:

According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika tenet, ignorance apprehending true existence, the *imprints* of that ignorance and the *imprints* of the delusions such as anger, attachment etc. are **cognitive obstructions**. Hence, Arhats who have overcome the root of Samsara still possess the ignorance apprehending true existence.

As explained previously (Handout 24, page 2), the proponents of the Svatantrika Madhyamika tenet assert that the ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is the root of Samsara and induces all the other delusions. Thus, the ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, other delusions induced by that ignorance, and the *seeds* of all those delusions are **afflictive obstructions**.

Furthermore, according to this tenet, Bodhisattvas reach liberation and Buddhahood simultaneously, which means that Bodhisattvas do not eliminate afflictive obstructions when they reach the eighth Bodhisattva bhumi. Instead they overcome afflictive and cognitive obscurations simultaneously.

	Afflictive obscurations	Cognitive obscurations
Savatantrika Madhyamika/ Middle Way Autonomy tenet	(1) Ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self (2) Other delusions such as anger, attachment etc. that are induced by the ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self (3) The <i>seeds</i> of the ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self and the <i>seeds</i> of the other delusions	(1) Ignorance apprehending true existence (2) The <i>imprints</i> of the ignorance apprehending true existence, the <i>imprints</i> of the ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, and the <i>imprints</i> of the other delusions such as anger, attachment etc. that are induced by the ignorance apprehending a self-sufficient, substantially existent self

Meditative equipoise and subsequent attainment [according to the Prasangika Madhyamika tenet]:

Learner Arya paths, that is, paths in the continua of those who have reached the (1) Hinayana or Mahayana path of seeing and the (2) Hinayana or Mahayana path of meditation are either:

- a) Exalted wisdoms of meditative equipoise/absorption, or
- b) Exalted wisdoms of subsequent attainment.

Exalted wisdoms of meditative equipoise/absorptions:

Tibetan: མཉམ་གཞན་ཡི་ཤེས། *Nyam-Zhag Ye-She*

(*Nyam-Zhag* = meditative equipoise/meditative absorption, *Nyam-par Zhag-pa* = to settle evenly, *Ye* = exalted/primordial, *She(-rab)* = wisdom)

Exalted wisdoms of meditative equipoise/absorption, or in short ‘meditative equipoises/absorptions’, in the continua of learner Aryas are direct perceivers who directly and explicitly realize emptiness. They are non-dualistic awarenesses because conventional truths do not appear to them.

Exalted wisdoms of meditative equipoise/absorption are called “exalted wisdom” because they are superior Arya paths, i.e. paths in the continua of those who have realized emptiness directly. They are called “meditative equipoise” because direct perceivers who directly realize emptiness settle the mind through meditation evenly on the emptiness of all phenomena. Another translation is “meditative absorption” because direct perceivers realizing emptiness “absorb” into emptiness in the sense that for the practitioner all appearances of the subject (the mind) and the object emptiness are extinguished in emptiness, and subject and object become indifferentiable, like water poured into water.

Exalted wisdoms of subsequent attainment:

Tibetan: རྗེ་ཐོབ་ཡི་ཤེས། *Je-Thob Ye-She*

(*Je* = subsequent, *Thob* = attainment/to attain, *Ye* = exalted/primordial, *She(-rab)* = wisdom)

All learner Arya paths that are not exalted wisdoms of meditative equipoise are exalted wisdoms of subsequent attainment. Exalted wisdoms of subsequent attainment in the continua of learner Aryas are dualistic paths because they have the appearance of conventional truths. In other words, if a mind is an exalted wisdom of subsequent attainment, a conventional truth necessarily appears to it. Even a learner’s exalted wisdom of subsequent attainment that realizes *emptiness* is a dualistic mind. It is a dualistic mind because it is necessarily a conceptual consciousness and thus a conventional truth appears to it. A learner’s exalted wisdom of subsequent attainment realizing emptiness is necessarily a conceptual consciousness because if it was a direct perceiver it would have to be an exalted wisdom of meditative absorption. However, this is not possible because in the continua of learner Aryas there is no path which is *both* an exalted wisdom of subsequent attainment and an exalted wisdom of meditative absorption.

